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ABSTRACT

The reading program described in this lesson plan supports students' exploration of multiple sources to create a timeline about the life of a person of their choosing and requires students to work together and to research and resolve potentially conflicting pieces of information about the life they research. During three 40-minute lessons, students will: negotiate with peers to select persons of interest for their study; use a variety of information resources to synthesize, create, and communicate what they have learned on a timeline; negotiate with peers to select key events; and research further to resolve conflicting information. The instructional plan, lists of web and conventional resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A biography selection and rationale worksheet is attached. (PM)

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Biographies: Creating Timelines of a Life

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Grade Band

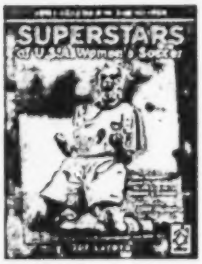
3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

Three 40-minute sessions

Overview

Studying the lives of others—biographies—is of interest and value to young learners. This lesson supports 3rd-5th grade students' exploration of multiple sources to create a timeline about the life of a person of their choosing. Further, the experience requires students to work together and to research and resolve potentially conflicting pieces of information about the life they research. Extension activities include developing essays from the original research.



From Theory to Practice

- Literacy involves using a variety of information resources to synthesize, create, and communicate meaning.
- Information about a topic, in this instance, a person, differs depending on each individual author's point of view, research sources, or focus of the research. There is no objective truth in any one text. Learners are continually challenged to resolve conflicting information.
- Choice is key to engaging learners. Building from learners' interests and current knowledge supports the development of new strategies.

Student Objectives

Students will

- negotiate with peers to select persons of interest for their study.
- use a variety of information resources to synthesize, create, and communicate what they've learned on a timeline.
- negotiate with peers to select key events.
- research further to resolve conflicting information.

Resources

- Biography Selection & Rationale Handout

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- ReadWriteThink Time Line Tool
- Lifelines of Persons of World Historical Interest Web Site
- The Biography Maker Web Site
- Images of Greatness Web Site
- African Americans in the Sciences Web Site

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Biography text sets. Use the Web Resources provided below to build yours.
- Information on your personality of choice.
- Strips of paper for timeline note taking (half a sheet of legal paper, 4.25"x14"), pens or pencils; alternately the online timeline tool for each student, ReadWriteThink Time Line Tool
- Biography text sets
- Internet access

Preparation

1. Review the written lesson and suggested links. Gather sufficient materials to introduce the lesson—ideally 3–4 information resources for up to six personalities, to include 1) biographies written at the 2nd–5th grade level, preferably including numerous pictures and charts, 2) video tapes, and 3) Web resources. Potential personalities include famous presidents [Washington, Lincoln, Kennedy], inventors [Franklin, George Washington Carver, Madame C.J. Walker], scientists [Marie Curie, Edwin Hubble, Samuel Lee Kountz, Jr.], space explorers [Neil Armstrong, Sally Ride, John Glenn], or athletes [Jim Thorpe, Ichiro Suzuki, Lance Armstrong]. This initial selection must often be limited to personalities for whom you can locate multiple resources, but should include a range of ages, gender, cultures, occupations, and historical and modern day figures.
2. Review use of the Time Line tool.
3. Conduct a short inquiry of your own on a personality of interest as a means of introducing the lesson. Amelia Earhart is one personality for whom you are likely to find disparate information and various hypotheses regarding her disappearance. See The Last Flight Web Site for information and additional Web sources.

Session One: Introducing the lesson

1. Share your interest in the chosen personality and your quest for more information about that person. Leaf through a magazine article or book, sharing key events, show short clips from a video, and/or share several pieces of information on a Web site.
2. Highlight instances when the authors of the resources emphasize different aspects of the personality's life or when you run across conflicting dates or information. Share that resolving such conflicts is always a challenge for researchers, and generate with students an initial list of ways they might resolve conflicting source information.
3. Introduce the initial set of resources, and invite groups of students to select and support with rationale two personalities worthy of the group's study among the collected resources, as well as two additional personalities (browsing the recommended web resources is one source for additional names). Students can make their selections on loose sheets of paper, in a bound notebook, or on the included biography selection and rationale sheet.
4. Ask students to work in small groups to make the selections and generate the rationale. If there is time, ask a spokesperson to share how different group members made their selections.
5. Create a whole group list of preferred choices, dividing into those for whom resources are

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already gathered and those that will require a search and gathering of sources.

6. Ask students to make an initial choice by adding their initials after the listed name of their choice. Indicate a deadline when resources must be collected for newly generated names—over the weekend is a workable timeframe—and join the students' search for those resources. The personality from the initial set of resources can serve as a "default" choice if resources can't be located, yet note that the quality of the research is enhanced by student commitment to a personality of interest so it can be well worth the effort to help students gather resources.

Session Two: Small group research

1. Students are seated in groups of 3–5 with sufficient resources so that each student has his or her own text on the same personality (book, magazine article, CD-ROM, Web site, video).
2. Ask students to browse their texts quietly, mapping the key events on their timeline paper strip. Encourage sufficient flexibility for students to invent their own ways of taking notes on the timeline. Advise that including page numbers, URLs and counter information will aid them in revisiting information if necessary.
3. All begin working quietly. Circulate to encourage those who are reading page-by-page to browse key subtitles, charts or photograph annotations. The independent work period should be limited to no more than 30-40 minutes.
4. As the small groups begin to finish browsing their texts, encourage them to share the gathered information among themselves. What have they found? What information is new? of interest? a surprise?
5. Ask the group to agree on 6-10 key events in the life of their personality. If computer access is limited and the online timeline tool must be shared, create a schedule so each group has the opportunity to enter the key events. Note that entering data and printing out the timeline must be accomplished in one sitting.

Session Three: Debriefing the initial research

1. Conduct a full group discussion of the groups' work: What went well, what was a challenge? Which texts were helpful? Which were less helpful? How did the group decide on key events? How will they further explore conflicting information?
2. Revisit the initial list of strategies to resolve conflicting information. Add strategies as necessary. Try the strategies out on one or two key conflicts as applicable.
3. Post the class-generated strategies in the school library for on-going reference.

Extensions

- Schedule additional small group work time to resolve conflicting information.
- Help teams develop short bibliographies of their resource text set, sharing the protocols for citation of the various sources.
- Create individual on-line timelines on figures of interest related to another course of study, i.e. world leaders, scientists, women explorers.
- Create autobiographical timelines.
- Recreate paper timelines, using colored pencils or fine tip markers to add illustrations.
- Use timelines as "notes" to write a fuller biography essay. One potential online tool that helps students manage their ideas and writing can be found at The Biography Maker Web Site.
- Begin another round of biography research, challenging students to research alone or in pairs, using the strategies developed in these introductory lessons.
- Categorize the attributes of the famous people you have studied. See the Images of Greatness Web Site as one example by a 4th/5th grade class.

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Web Resources

Images of Greatness
http://www.kyrene.k12.az.us/schools/brisas/sunda/great/great.htm
This site is the creation of a 4th/5th grade class and includes brief biographies of 12 historical figures.

Lifelines of Persons of World Historical Interest
http://users.uniserve.com/~andreasn/chart/chart.html
100 historical figures are arranged on a timeline spanning 500 years. This site supports the selection of important world figures by older students.

African Americans in the Sciences
http://www.princeton.edu/~mcbrown/display/faces.html
African Americans in the sciences are organized by profession.

The Biography Maker
http://www.bham.wednet.edu/bio/biomaker.htm
This site created by students helps writers organize information to create biographical essays.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Group conversation
- Timelines

This lesson was originally developed with Maggie Chase and Bess Berghoff, Indiana University 1990.

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

7 - Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

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Biography Selection & Rationale

Or, why I chose this personality to study

Name

Date

Class

Today we introduced a number of personalities whose lives we will study over the next couple of days. Please list below the TWO that are most interesting to you and tell why.

Personality #1

I am interested in his/her life because

Personality #2

I am interested in his/her life because

Personal choices

You may elect to study a personality of your choice, on the provision that you can form a group of 2-4 other interested classmates and bring in resources to support your study. You will need biographies that include ample illustrations and can be browsed in 15 minutes. These might include websites or videos. If your group isn't able to locate resources by _____, you will be assigned to work with one of the selections above.

Personality #3

I am interested in his/her life because

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